

Legislative Foundations for the Capitol

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Next week will mark the 130th anniversary since the State of Texas dedicated our current Capitol building. From May 14–19, 1888, more than 20,000 people came from all over the state to participate in festivities such as drill team competitions, military displays, band concerts, and fireworks. The events culminated with the official dedication on May 16, when [Sen. Temple Houston](#) (the youngest son of [Sam Houston](#)) accepted the building on the state's behalf.

The [Constitution of 1876](#)—which is still our constitution today—made financial provision for the new building in [Article XVI, Sec. 57](#), authorizing the use of 3 million acres of public land in the Texas Panhandle to pay for the new capitol and calling on the Legislature to pass the necessary bills to begin the project. (That land would become [XIT Ranch](#).)

In 1879, the 16th Legislature passed [SB 21, 16R](#), "Relating to providing for designating, surveying and sale of three million and fifty thousand acres of the unappropriated public domain for the erection of a new state capitol and other necessary public buildings at the seat of government, and to providing a fund to pay for surveying said lands" and [SB 153, 16R](#), "Relating to providing for building a new state capitol."

To facilitate the passage of Capitol-related bills, several committees were formed. During construction, committees were charged with the "[programme](#)" for the [laying of the corner stone](#) (1885) and considering the "[new Capitol, grounds and cost of furnishing](#)" (1887).

On May 2, 1888, [HB 38, 20\(1\)](#) was approved, "an Act to provide for the reception of the new State Capitol Building." They accepted the Capitol—contingent on the completion of all remaining work—and on [May 10](#), authorized the moving of furniture from the temporary Capitol to the new one. Most offices were established in their new spaces by May 11, and the Legislature convened in its new chambers for the first time.

After the dedication, the work continued: in 1889, committees were formed to investigate the [cost of running a capitol elevator](#), the [acoustics of the House chamber](#), and [Capitol grounds](#) considerations like placing "a neat and substantial iron

fence around said grounds" and "the cost of properly wiring the Capitol building, with all necessary fixtures, with the view of placing electric lights in said building." Fortunately, they did not use all of the money from the sale of the XIT land to construct the building, so they had some funding left over to address these and other budgetary needs—allocating that money was the reason for the [20th Legislature's special session](#) in April–May 1888.

The work continues today—since 1853, more than 40 committees have been charged with [Capitol-related topics](#). Modernizing the building, repairing after 1983 fire damage, and maintaining the grounds has kept the Legislature (and of course, the State Preservation Board) busy over the years. But, Sen. Houston said it well:

It would seem that here glitters a structure that shall stand as a sentinel of eternity, to gaze upon passing ages, and, surviving, shall mourn as each separate star expires. ~Sen. Temple Houston, Capitol Dedication Speech, May 16, 1888

See the *Handbook of Texas'* entry on the [Capitol](#) to learn more about the process of designing and constructing the building.

Images

Top: [Capitol Construction], photograph, 1887~; (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth124107/: accessed May 4, 2018), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

Bottom: [Cavalry Troops Marching in Texas Capitol Building Dedication Parade], photograph, April 28, 1888; (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth124468/: accessed May 4, 2018), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

Cover: [Construction of Capitol Dome], photograph, 1888; (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth124243/: accessed May 4, 2018), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

Sources consulted:

"[Capitol](#)," Handbook of Texas Online, Texas State Historical Association

"[Capitol History](#)," Texas State Preservation Board

A Nobler Edifice: The Texas State Capitol, 1888-1988, An Exhibit, the Lorenzo de Zavala State Archives and Library Building. Texas State Library, 1988.

The Texas Capitol: A History of the Lone Star Statehouse. Texas Legislative Council, 2016.